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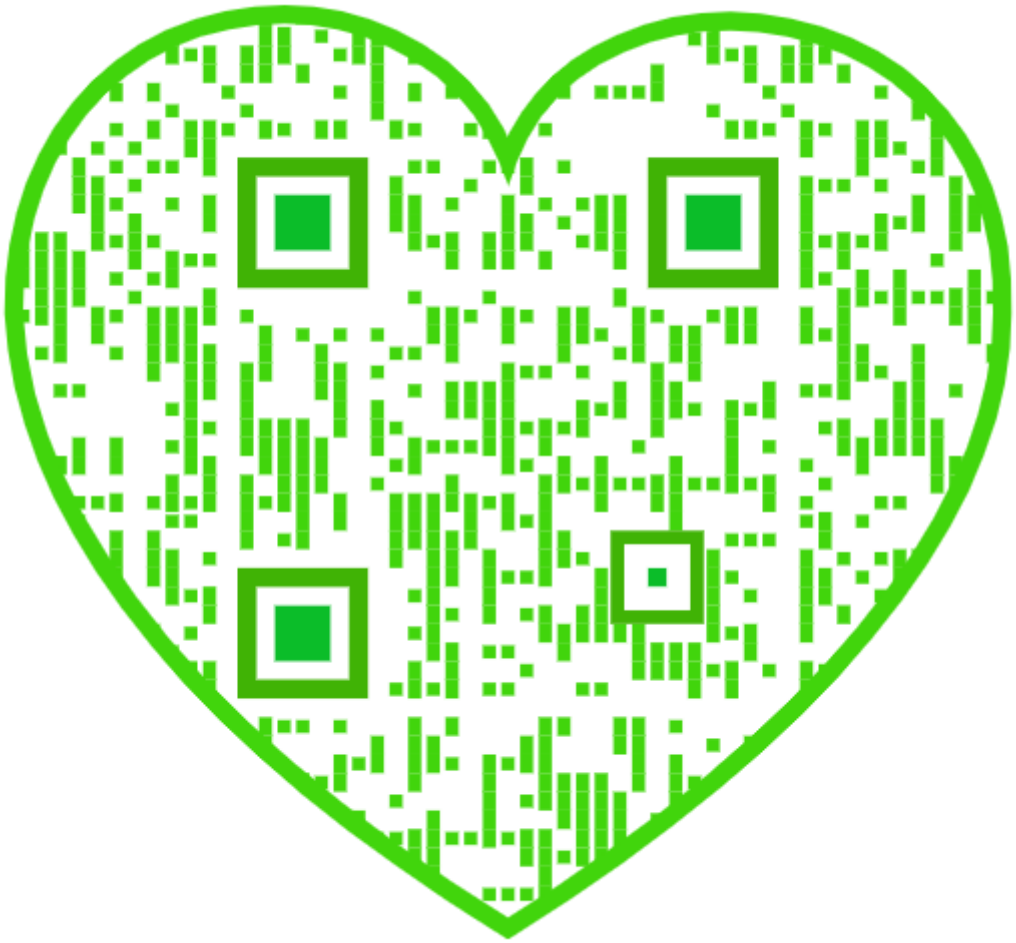
THE ANTIQUITY OF ENGRAVING AND THE UTILITY & PLEASURES OF PRINTS.



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THE ORIGIN

AND

Antiquity of Engraving:

WITH

SOME REMARKS

ON THE

UTILITY AND PLEASURES OF PRINTS.

SPERO MELIORA.

PHILADELPHIA:
GEORGE GEBBIE.
1872.

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To James L. Claghorn, Esq.

In dedicating to you this effort, to increase an interest in the uses and pleasures of prints, I ask for it the same impartial consideration extended to the examination of a work of art, which, if the intention is found to be good, and a sincere desire to develop truth made apparent, you accept, or at least tolerate, although there may be many and perhaps glaring faults.

Permit me to thank you, not alone for the liberal manner with which the folios of your valuable collection (unequalled in this country, as respects the works of modern engravers) have been opened to me, but also for the associations thus established with a generous-minded, warm hearted gentleman.

W. S. B.

February, 1872

TO THE READER.

THIS little work, originally intended to be privately distributed, has been deemed of sufficient importance to warrant a more extended circulation.

It is a simple tribute to "that educational influence, which may be exerted by well-chosen prints," and the only regret is, that I have not succeeded in rendering it more worthy of the subject.

THE AUTHOR.

THE ORIGIN

AND

Antiquity of Engraving.

"Them hath he filled with wisdom of heart, to work all manner of work, of the engraver."—EXODUS, XXXV

THE ORIGIN

AND

ANTIQUITY OF ENGRAVING.

ANTIQUITY, with its mythical legends and cloudy superstitions, has ever had a charm for man. The acutest intellects of all ages have sought exercise, in inquiries, into the habits and customs, arts and laws of ancient peoples; and the records of the past are searched for precedents, for causes and effects, and a weight of authority is given to them, which, although sometimes delusive, is always agreeable.

That which has been is better understood and judged than that which is; and

the past seems ever more bright and potent than the present.

> "There is given unto
> The things of earth, which time hath bent,
> A spirit's feeling."

Let us throw around our subject these mysterious shadows of antiquity: and, in claiming the art of engraving or making incisions in some durable substance to be coeval with existence, charm and interest at the outset.

The inherent love of imitation, seeking expression in the endeavor to reproduce in some simple manner visible objects, would early suggest this mode of conveying ideas and depicting form; and the hand, in obedience thereto, soon appropriate stone, metal or wood, and, by incision, delineate or engrave thereon natural objects or conventional signs, in manner best suited to the comprehension of the age.

Gratitude or admiration, prompting memorial stones or monuments—the earliest attempts at architecture—would readily inscribe thereon a testimony to the virtues and heroic deeds of the dead. The colossal tombs of ancient Egypt are covered thus with the earliest productions of the art, and within them are found graven plates authenticated to thousands of years prior to the Christian era.

In such manner has been transmitted the little knowledge we possess of the nations of remote antiquity, and their precepts and laws descend to us engraven on stone or metal. The ancient writers speak of the armor and shields of their heroes as being engraved; and the records of Assyria and Babylon refer to incisions, either for ornament or information, in the walls and temples of that wonderful race.

Scattered throughout the pages of Holy Writ we find constant references to in-

scribed altars and graven plates. Job, in the depth of his misery, exclaims, "Oh that my words were graven with an iron pen and lead in the rock forever!" From the awful heights of Sinai issues the divine command, "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image;" and God in his commands to Moses says, "And thou shalt make a plate of pure gold, and grave upon it, like the engravings of a signet, HOLINESS TO THE LORD."

The priority of signet or seal rings to the promulgation of the Jewish laws being thus incontestably established, we need only refer to the Assyrian custom of wearing them, and the many samples taken from the tombs of ancient Egypt, some of which may have come directly under the notice of most of us.

In the Abbott Collection of Egyptian Antiquities, in the Museum of the New York Historical Society, may be seen, in

the highest state of preservation, the large gold signet ring of Chufu, as high priest or king, twenty-three hundred years before Christ. It was found in a tomb at Ghizeh, and is of fine gold, with the hieroglyphics and symbols beautifully executed and minutely detailed.

The gem engravers of Egypt, under the domination of the priesthood, could only transmit conventional signs as directed by them, and all originality and desire of excelling being thus suppressed, we must look to Greece, with its freedom and poetic mythology, for the perfection of this branch of engraving.

The cameos and intaglios of the Greeks, remarkable alike for exquisite execution and purity of design, show the influence of a deep love and study of nature, and bear indelibly stamped thereon, the characteristics of a great nation.

If the genuis and acquirements of this

people demanded such forms of grace and ideal beauty, as have been bequeathed to us by their sculptors and gem engravers, it may well be supposed that their painters would also conceive and execute works of like excellence.

Had the art of engraving for multiplying impressions, as since practiced, been known to them, in place of the bald descriptions of the historian, we would revel in transcripts, from the divine creations of a Xeuxis or an Apelles.

Die engraving, the offspring of intaglio gem engraving, was a great step in the application of this art to the purposes and enlightenment of mankind. Coining or stamping of money and medals, in establishing a mode of circulation and transmission of information, forms perhaps quite as important a feature in the history of the world as that of the discovery of movable type.

Money, accepted as a representative of values, gave an impetus to commerce,—that most potent agent for civilization,—the effects and results of which can be scarcely computed; quickening into being thoughts and inventions, and entering into all the great enterprises that have refined and benefited mankind, it may well be termed the lever of the world.

If the Lydians invented the art of engraving dies and stamping money, the Grecians very soon adopted and perfected it; and with the same high artistic development, as is shown through all their works, have transmitted to us those coins and medals, which, like visible histories, stamp into our memories the stirring events and master minds of Greece and Rome.

The glory of Greece is departed: Rome, with its triumphs and grandeur, the mistress of the world, has become a by-word and warning: their histories are written,—

"First Freedom, and then Glory—when that fails,
Wealth, vice, corruption,—barbarism at last;"

but art, immortal art remains; founded on the immutable principles of nature, though dormant at times, only to revive with fresher powers and wider influences.

We now approach a memorable and important era, not alone in art, but in the history of man—that of the introduction of wood engraving, the parent of printing from the surface by means of a press, which soon suggesting the use of movable characters, resulted finally in the discovery of typography.

It is admitted on all sides, that engraving on wood and printing therefrom is of Chinese origin, and practised by them many centuries previous to the knowledge of such an art by any nation of Europe.

Jean Baptiste Papillon, a French engraver on wood, writing about the middle

of the last century, speaks of having seen in a private library a volume containing eight pictures, representing the heroic actions of Alexander, and described in a rudely engraven frontispiece, as imagined and executed at Ravenna, in relief on blocks of wood, by Alessandro Alberico Cunio and Isabella Cunio, twin brother and sister, explained by verses and thus marked on paper. The dedication fixing the date at about A. D. 1285.

This story, deemed fictitious by most writers, having been accepted by Ottley in his admirable History of Engraving, establishes the fact that engraving on wood and printing therefrom was practised, in that part of Italy bordering on the Gulf of Venice, as early as the thirteenth century.

A decree of the government of Venice, in the year 1441, in reciting that the art of making cards and printed figures, used

at Venice, had fallen to total decay, orders, (to encourage home manufacture of these articles,) that no work of said art, that is printed or painted on cloth or on paper,—that is to say altar pieces or images and playing cards,—shall be brought into the city.

This, when coupled with the account of the two Cunio, furnishes a reasonable ground for the conjecture, that engraving on wood had been practised from a very early period by the Venetians, for the manufacture of playing-cards and representation of religious subjects, who learned it in the course of commerce from the Chinese, and it thus became gradually known throughout Europe,—the use of playing-cards performing an important part in this dissemination.

The Germans and inhabitants of the Low Countries appear to have especially appropriated this art, and the custom of

engraving the images of saints and other devout representations, prevailed in those countries as early as the fourteenth century; but the impressions taken from these blocks not being deemed of value, very few have been preserved to us.

The print of St. Christopher crossing a river with the infant Jesus on his shoulders, of which there are but two impressions in existence, (one in the Paris Collection, the other formerly in the library of Earl Spencer,) was for a long time supposed to be the earliest wood-cut bearing date, to wit 1423; but the recent discovery of one dated 1418, the only known impression of which is in the Royal Library at Brussels, establishes this fact as five years earlier in time.

Engraving sets of prints, religious or historical, accompanied with text or descriptions on the same block, would naturally follow, and thus originated our first

books, which being printed from solid wooden blocks, are termed Block Books.

The earliest Block Book, (a production of the Low Countries,) is the *Biblia Pauperum*, a small folio of forty leaves, printed on one side of the paper only, from a similar number of blocks of wood, each block containing three sacred subjects from the Old and New Testament, with Latin inscriptions. The blank sides of each two leaves being pasted together, gives the appearance of a book printed in the ordinary manner on both sides of the paper. This book is supposed to be of a date not later than 1420.

But the most interesting work of this character, (later in date than the one just referred to,) standing as it does midway between Block Books and the first specimen of typography, is the *Speculum Humanæ Salvationis*, a folio of fifty-eight cuts, containing one hundred and sixteen

designs, and printed also on one side only of the paper. This book is remarkable for the fact, that the text of one edition is printed partly from fixed letters and partly from movable type, and in all other known editions is printed entirely from what has been sufficiently proved to be cast type. This book has been ascribed to the press of Laurence Coster, of Haerlem, and is prior to the year 1472.

It was only subsequent to this establishment of typography that the wood engravers of Italy, and especially of Venice, began to exert their talents in illustrating printed books with wood-cuts.

Having thus, in a general manner, attempted to show the antiquity of engraving, its influence in extending commerce, and agency in the discovery of typography, we will proceed to form the last link, in what may be termed the genealogy of this art, —the link that, above all others, interests

and charms us the most, since to it we owe those fine productions of the burin and needle, which have ever ministered, in the highest degree, to the enjoyment and welfare of man. We allude to the discovery of the mode of printing or delivering ink from the incisions of engraved metal plates, by means of the roller, from which time engraving became, as it were, a new art.

Chalcography, the art of engraving, or more strictly speaking, writing on metal, was practised, as already mentioned, from the most remote periods of antiquity; but it seems not to have been discovered that such engravings were capable of being printed from. That a species of engraving on metal, every way fitted for giving impressions, was used by the Egyptians, Greeks, and Romans, is placed beyond all doubt; and it would be a matter for astonishment that these acute and inventive

nations had never applied this art to such purposes, were we not certain that paper—which plays so important a part in this reproduction—was entirely unknown to them.

It was fitly given to Florence, the cradle of modern art, where Dante sang and Giotto painted,—Florence, the home of the Medici,—to witness the first impression taken on paper from an engraved metal plate.

Vasari, that most interesting biographer, (the prototype of all Boswell's, in admiration of his subject,) writing about the middle of the sixteenth century, informs us that the goldsmiths of Italy, and especially Florence, in decorating plate destined for sacred purposes, such as chalices, paxes, and the like, after designing the intended subject with a point of steel upon silver, engraved and finished the work with the burin,—the same tool used by the line-engraver of the present day. When thus

engraved and finished, the lines were filled in with a composition of silver and lead, which being of a black color, (in order to throw out the design,) received the name of Niello; and such work termed Niello-work, from the Latin *nigellum*.

In this mode of workmanship, says Vasari, Maso Finiguerra, of Florence, was a most admirable artist.

It was the custom of that goldsmith, whenever he had engraved any work in silver, to take an impression (previous to filling in the Niello) upon dampened paper; the engraving having first been charged with lamp-black and oil by pressing a roller over it; his work as thus printed assuming the appearance of a pen-drawing.

Of Finiguerra's works in silver, the one made most memorable is a pax of the Assumption of the Virgin, preserved among the records of the church of San Giovanni,

at Florence, and executed, as is proved by the records thereof, in the year 1452.

An impression from this work was discovered by the Abbé Zani, so late as November, 1797, in the National Cabinet at Paris. The composition is good, although from the number of figures introduced in a space three inches by five, somewhat confused; the drawing is quite remarkable, and the beauty and expression of the heads show Finiguerra to have been possessed of a high degree of excellence in art,—far in advance of his time.

This custom of Finiguerra's, (the knowledge of which, resting previously to this date entirely upon the dictum of Vasari,) has thus been substantiated, and enables us to fix the time and place which witnessed, and the person that orignated printing from engraved metal plates.

Practised solely at first by him, for the purpose of preserving a record of his

work, it was not held as a secret, and being openly divulged, many years did not elapse before the art, in this its first state, was generally adopted by the workers in Niello throughout Italy: Finiguerra improving the process by increasing the pressure of the roller, which the other goldsmiths seem not to have done.

Appropriated to these purposes, it would be limited to the taking of one, or at the most, two impressions, and the fortunate possessor of one of these prints may well glory in exhibiting that, which in the practice of later years has been so much abused,—a veritable *Artist's Proof*.

Many proofs taken by the early goldsmiths are in existence, and form a most interesting feature in a collection of prints; but it is difficult, in most cases, to identify the author, and very few have been satisfactorily traced as the work of Finiguerra.

The transition from this first state of the

art would be the growth of time; and it was not until the year 1460 that the real importance of calcography became evident, or that plates of larger dimensions, and engraved purposely for multiplying impressions for publication were produced. This is what Lanzi terms the second state of the art,—the printing, quite imperfect, from ink of a greyish tint, and of little consistency.

As the art of printing engravings became better understood, plates of copper began to be used instead of the softer metals; and, with a press of adequate power and printing ink of sufficient consistency, the impressions received their full effect. The art then attained, as far as relates to impressions, its third or mature state.

There appears to be no ground for conjecture, that Finiguerra ever practised the art for other than Niello-work; his excel-

lence in which may well cause regret that such was the case.

Excepting the illustrations of an Almanac, published at Florence in 1464, the earliest Italian prints, from plates engraved for the purpose of publication and of which the date is ascertained, are three, contained in a book printed and published at Florence, in the year 1477, entitled "*Monte Santo di Dio*," and are the joint performance of two Florentine goldsmiths, Baccio Baldini and Sandro Botticelli, who also engraved the plates for the edition of Dante, published at the same place in 1481. These prints, confused in design and rude in execution, mark no particular advance in the art, and are more valued for their antiquity than beauty.

The productions of Antonio del Pollaguolo, (1426–1498,) another Florentine goldsmith, deemed worthy enough by Lorenzo Ghiberti to assist in his renowned

work of the brass gates for the Baptistery of St. John, in Florence, claim attention for their close study of the anatomy of the human figure. His rare and celebrated print of *A Battle of Naked Figures*, an early copy of which is in the collection of a gentleman of this city, (destined at some future day to be a most important art-inheritance of Philadelphia,) fully shows his knowledge in this respect; the outlines are engraved with a firm, deep stroke, and though exaggerated as regards form, its general character is redeemed by the singular delicacy and neatness of line of the shadows.

We come now to one, more properly termed the first of Italian engravers,—Andrea Mantegna, the son of a herdsman, born at Padua, in 1431. This eminent artist attained an early proficiency in painting, and is said to have executed the chief altar-piece in the church of San Sofia, at

Padua, when but seventeen years of age. Vasari, in his life of Mantegna says, that "he engraved his *Triumphs of Cæsar* on copper, a work of which much account was made, because better engravings had not then been seen."

The engravings of Mantegna, shaded with lines of remarkable precision, drawn obliquely from right to left, without cross-hatchings, are executed with much freedom and correctness of outline, and are evidently close transcripts from the original pen-and-ink drawings. From their simplicity and truth they take hold of the mind at once.

His beautiful print of the *Virgin and Child*, expressing in the most marked manner the tenderness of love and pride of maternity, impresses the beholder in the highest degree, and once seen is never forgotten.

But it is time to leave the south, and

turn our attention to a northern clime and people.

Germany had no Vasari; and, whether the goldsmiths of the fifteenth century, in that country, practised working in Niello, or that, previous to the discovery of a well constructed press, they made any attempts to procure impressions from their engravings on metal, is to us concealed knowledge. The superiority of the German artists over those of Italy, in the management of the burin, as well as skill in printing, is well established; and as this could only be attained by practice, we may be sustained in declaring that engraving on metal must have been known to them prior to the time of their first dated prints.

Art, in its outward expression, feels its way slowly, step by step, from infancy to youth, from youth to maturity,—never leaping into being fully armed. The early practice of wood-cutting by the Germans

may have however paved the way, and the national patience and perseverance assisted in this quick development; for it seems but a moment from the "Master of 1466" to Martin Schoen.

This subject, so long a fruitful source of argument, was only apparently settled by the discovery of the Niello-print in 1797; for there may yet be discovered some evidence favoring quite as early a date for the German as that for the Italian school.

The earliest dated prints of the German school are the work of an unknown artist, called the "Master of 1466," from that date being found on some of his plates, and who is supposed to have been the first to use the rolling press, and make the engraving of copper-plates a profession. It has been well said, that his skill in handling the graver and the number of his works, prove sufficiently that he was not the first who attempted this pursuit.

The prints of this master are exceedingly rare, and it is supposed that there is but one in this country,—that of the *Idolatry of Solomon*, in the collection bequeathed by the late Francis C. Gray to Harvard College. He is said to have been wonderfully expert with the graver, and easy, though not always correct in his drawing. Thoroughly Gothic in taste, with an ideal of beauty entirely different from ours, yet his art was something more than a mere literal representation; and he enjoys the reputation of being the first German engraver who devoted his talent to rendering feeling and expression.

His engravings are principally religious subjects, and include a set of twelve—*The Passion of our Lord*—probably the origin of the numerous designs of this interesting history, produced by succeeding German and Dutch engravers.

Martin Schoen, or Schongauer, (1420-

1488,) the real father of the German school of engraving, and immediate successor of the "Master of 1466," was considered one of the greatest artists of his time. His intimacy with Pietro Perugino, the master of Raphael, and with whom he frequently exchanged drawings, was the means of his prints being early known to the Italians, and by whom they were held in much esteem; and it is related that Michael Angelo in his youth, was so much pleased with his print of *St. Anthony Tormented by Devils*, that he copied it in color.

With great facility in the management of the burin—his touch being most delicate and refined—his works display a close observation of nature; the heads of much beauty and purity of expression, and the draperies well disposed. By far the greater part of his engravings are representations of sacred subjects, and are distinguished

by simplicity joined to a devoutness of character, peculiarly his own.

Thoroughly imbued with a deep religious feeling, (and we recognize no art lacking this essential,) they will always be viewed with the highest gratification and improvement. His works were much admired by his successors, and strongly influenced them; and it is even said that Raphael borrowed the fine motive of his figure of Christ, in the renowned Spasimo di Sicilia, from Schoen's print of Christ bearing his cross to Calvary,—a composition of thirty figures, and considered his most capital production.

But here at the close of the fifteenth century—the dawn of modern engraving—we must pause, for the subject widens far beyond the limits of our design.

With the advent of the sixteenth century the morning mists disappear, and the sun rising with all its majesty and power in

the grand old German of Nuremberg, reflected first on the friend and translator of Raphael,—tinges peak after peak, hill-top after hill-top, valley after valley, until the whole broad scene, not one spot untouched, lies glowing in the splendor of noon.

As we glance down the long array of talent, from Durer and Marc Antonio to Toschi and Mandel, how the clustering memories of three hundred and fifty years of glory and renown surround us! The earnestness of the German, and truth of the Dutch; the grace and refinement of the Italian, with the polish of the French schools—added to the sobriety and dignity of the English—unite in forming such a complete and harmonious whole, that the most cultivated eye and refined taste are satisfied, and the limit attained.

"It concerns you something to know it."
ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL.
Act 1. Scene 3.

Before considering the subject of the Utility and Pleasures of Prints, it will be proper to give a cursory glance to the different descriptions and modes of producing them: our remarks being restricted to impressions taken from metal plates; those printed from wood-cuts, now so important in their uses and improvements, not being included in this view.

There are three principal kinds of prints, —Engravings, already referred to, Etchings, and Mezzotintos,—the respective characteristics of which, in the order as named, are strength, freedom, and softness; all which qualities may however be combined, and when done with judgment and taste,

result in some of the most exquisite productions of the art.

The ordinary graver or burin, from its angular shape, leaves a clean, well-defined incision, which, in its depth or delicacy, may be regulated according to the character of the line required. The strokes gradually increasing in number near to one another, and crossed again and again, produce, according to their position and thickness, tints more or less varied to make up the whole.

This process, the most comprehensive in its powers, touching as well grace and greatness, grandeur and simplicity, is excessively difficult to perform, requiring long practice and experience; and, unless aided by taste, becomes mere mechanism, devoid of nature or truth.

Some of the finest examples of pure Line Engraving may be found in the works of Schelte à Bolswert, the contemporary

of Rubens, who is said to have retouched his proofs. They are distinguished for their character and dignity, and exhibit great ability in conveying the vigor and color of that master.

His print of *Christ Crowned with Thorns*, after Vandyck, contains all the elements of greatness, and is one of the acknowledged master-pieces of the art.

Etching, however, being simply drawing on copper with a steel point or needle, with the addition of acid to fasten it, partakes of the freedom of originality; and, when finished with the dry point, (so termed from its use not being followed with the acid,) gives from the burr thus raised those rich velvety effects, which Rembrandt, through his skill in printing, knew so well how to manage.

Etching, or engraving by means of aquafortis, was first practised by Albert Durer, who seems however not to have discovered

its value; the industrious German preferring to overcome the difficulties of the burin.

Its resources were first developed in the early half of the sixteenth century by the Italian painter, Francesco Mazzuoli, called Il Parmigiano,—whose works, although from want of practice not well corroded with the acid, are valued for their elegance and grace, and as laying the real foundation of this interesting mode of multiplying original drawings.

The union of Line Engraving with Etching—adding freedom to strength—has given us all those fine renderings of nature, of which the English school of landscape is confessedly the chief.

Mezzotinto, on the other hand, is quite the opposite from either engraving or etching; in this case the lights being made by removing the shadows, while in the two

latter the shadows are produced by decreasing the lights.

In this process the surface of the plate is equally roughened by a suitable tool; an impression taken in this state being entirely black; the ground thus laid is then scraped away, more or less, as the tints are to be stronger or fainter, and entirely removed where high lights are required.

Scraping in Mezzotinto (brought to its highest state in England) was first practised by a German officer, Von Siegen, who produced his first plate, a portrait, in 1643, and was communicated by him to Prince Rupert, nephew of Charles the first.

Walpole's story of that Prince having discovered it by observing the action of dew in rusting the fire-arm of a sentinel, who had partly scraped it away, is ingenious, but devoid of truth; but as we ever prefer

tracing inventions to a sudden conception, the Prince will perhaps never be robbed of this honor.

This *Schwarze-Kunst*, or Black Art of the German, is best adapted to rendering pictures of few figures and strong concentration of light and dark, and possesses great excellence in portraiture; for no other style of engraving can so well represent the luminous quality and blending in of shadow with the back-ground,—thus creating almost an actual presence.

Many striking instances of this occur in the works of the best Mezzotinto engravers of the English school; among others may be mentioned *The Rabbi*, by William Pether; a *Portait of Rembrandt*, by James MacArdell; and one by William Say, after Sir William Beechey.

THE UTILITY

AND

Pleasures of Prints.

"There is many a moment when the ear is listless of talk, when the eye is listless or weary of the printed page, but when the silent teachings of a work of art pass unconsciously into the heart."

THE UTILITY

AND

PLEASURES OF PRINTS.

HERE the theme is so broad, so full of recollections of purest delight and most gentle instruction, and the writer owes to them so many happy moments of refined companionship and elevated associations, that he may well hesitate in undertaking a task much beyond his limited powers of expression. But gratitude—keenly alive to all the advantages to be derived from these uses and pleasures—incites the endeavor, in a hope that others may at least catch a glimpse of this beautiful land.

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In all stages of life, whether for use, pleasure, or instruction, the art of engraving exercises an important and permanent influence.

Through its representations of familiar objects, the germ of childish intellect is first quickened; by its illustrations, the elementary studies of youth are directed and assisted; and, by its reproductions, the inventions in mechanics and discoveries of science are better understood and more widely known; and, as a means of conveying the higher qualities of the mind, as expressed by the best artists of all times, it is invaluable.

All grades and classes of society are affected by it; the rude wood-cut of the cottage is as suggestive in its degree as the rare artist's proof of more favored

homes; and the early scrap-gatherings of boyhood days are as instructive and important as the choice collection of the connoisseur of a later period.

In all the elements that unite in forming a complete picture,—such as design, composition, and distribution of light and shade,—prints are in every respect quite equal to paintings; and, although from the want of color (and even that may be suggested) expression may not be so fully rendered, yet prints convey a much clearer idea of drawing and perspective. Color, with its magical gradations of tint, is deceptive, and often conceals gross faults of drawing; and the critical eye, where the latter is a prominent quality, receives quite as much pleasure from prints as from paintings.

The grace and purity of outline, so much admired in Marc Antonio, was acquired from the carefully executed drawings of Raphael; his engravings being made from

them, and not from the finished paintings of that great master.

The texture of all stuffs, the qualities of metal and wood, and even the subtelty of atmosphere itself, can be rendered by prints. The dewy freshness of morn, the sultry glow of noon, and the solemn hush of eve are all given; and the classical landscapes of Wilson, as translated by the master hand of Woollett, are so fresh and bright, and so full of the truth of nature, that we seem to "live and move and have our being" in the scenes thus set before us.

Through prints we become familiar with the habits and customs of the people of all nations; their daily lives and homes, their comforts and privations become apparent to us, awakening the sympathies and increasing our interest in man; while from the study of individual and national characteristics we may improve and elevate our own times.

By their faithful delineations of the scenery of all countries,—nature in its various forms of beauty and grandeur, its mountains and valleys, its rivers and oceans, is lavishly spread before us; while, with a mere turn of the hand and in slippered ease, we can travel from pole to pole, and "put a girdle round about the earth in forty minutes."

The elegant allegories and varied instructions of mythology, with its poetical representations of the elements and presiding deities, have ever furnished a pleasant excitement for the imagination, and awakened some of the finest conceptions of art. In the world-renowned fresco of Guido, as given us by Morghen, the God of Light—etherial as the idea—preceded by Aurora scattering freshness and beauty, moves steadily on, and we feel the earth reviving under their genial influence. A

beautiful thought, beautifully embodied and translated.

The pages of the Sacred Volume have been so amply illustrated, that in any ordinary collection of prints the acts and precepts of Christ are fully set forth. The divinity and sufferings of the Son of God, who died that we might be saved, are thoroughly impressed upon us; and the mission of Christian art, to raise and prepare man for a higher and more perfect state, is, through the intervention of prints, brought to the feelings and preceptions of all; and it only remains for each one to take and appropriate unto himself the fullness of these teachings.

An an incentive and aid to the study of history, prints are of much importance; they freshen the memory of striking events, and speak to us of those deeds of heroism and self-denial that have benefited and elevated our race.

By portraits, they bring us face-to-face with the men of all times, remarkable for genius or virtue. Rulers, who have shaped the destinies of nations; statesmen, who have governed rulers and peoples; poets, who have refined; philosophers, who have improved; and, philanthrophists, who have benefited. We are thus enabled to study the character of each, and the truths and sequels of history become more prominent and intelligible.

In the full-length portrait of Louis the fourteenth, with its false title of "Louis le grand,"—engraved by the elder Drevet, from the painting by Rigaud,—after admiring the work of the engraver, the delicacy of line, and close imitation of draperies, we read his character almost at a glance. Pride, ignorance, and a selfish disregard of the feelings and rights of others are plainly exhibited; and we need not refer to the pages of history to ascertain the

results of the rule of such a king, nor wonder at its culmination in the sad events of a later reign.

By prints, the master-pieces of art, scattered through the public and private galleries of the world, requiring much time and causing great inconvenience even to examine them, are brought into our daily companionship, free from excitement or restraint. The whole world of genius lies revealed to us; and, not restricted to any particular school or painter, we have the privilege of selecting the finest examples of each, and thus possess for convenient reference that which insensibly improves our taste and elevates our judgment.

Time is fast eating into and robbing many of these treasures of their pristine beauty, while the vandalism of man and the action of the elements have utterly destroyed others; and it behooves us to carefully preserve these translations, which,

sooner or later, will be the only visible records of works which have stood the test of time and years of enlightened criticism.

The prints of the early engravers derive their great value and interest from being the handiwork of eminent painters; and furnish a constant source of study, not alone for the art, but also for the artist.

The intense earnestness and devotion, conspicuous in all the works of Durer, excite a deep feeling for the subject, and enlist our affections for the man.

In his print of the legendary tale of the *Conversion of St. Hubert*, (his largest and most finished engraving, the plate of which was filled in with gold, by order of the Emperor Rudolph the second, and is still thus preserved,) these qualities of mind and heart are made apparent to the most careless observer.

The knight, while hunting, is stopped suddenly in his career of sinful and worldly

pleasures by the apparition of a stag bearing the crucifix between its horns. The awe and veneration expressed in the countenance and kneeling figure of the knight, at the appearance of the divine messenger, cannot be misunderstood; even the horse and dogs seem to comprehend the passing event, while the faithful attention to detail in the landscape, adds also to the interest and truth of the scene.

But how shall we speak of the witchery of painter's etchings, with their freedom and grace; often mere suggestions, but fresh from the mind,—full of spirit and genius? The point, gliding easily over the surface, follows the inspiration of the moment: and we have original sketches by artists whose works are so precious as exponents of the purity within.

Etchings from the hand of Guido, who touched not but to create beauty and grace; from Claude, the poet of nature;

or, from that master of intellectual portraiture, Vandyck, must always possess an indefinable charm; linked with which is the pleasant thought that, unlike original drawings, restricted to a few, many may be enjoying them at the same moment.

But these, and scores of other works of like merit and value, must yield to the enchantment of the "inspired Dutchman," —whose complete mastery of light and shade, and wonderful combination of etching and dry point, have given us works which fascinate as well the refined as the uncultivated observer. Rembrandt treats his subject in such a simple and truthful manner that we enter into the spirit of the action at once, without being bewildered by surrounding objects, or wearied with unnecessary detail; and it has been beautifully said, that his genius, like the lustre of precious stones, shines from the centre, not from the surface.

His touch is as free as thought; and a line here and a scratch there, are as expressive of character and action, as the most labored efforts of others; and if his models are not of the most refined nature, and his drawing not always correct, such is the power of his pathos and the simplicity of his composition, that we readily pardon the lesser faults in admiration of the greater excellence of the whole.

His freedom of handling and powers of expression are never more conspicuous than in his portraits; which, for picturesque effect, individuality of character, and rendering of age, have never been equalled.

The Death of the Virgin, a large and much esteemed print, is perhaps one of the finest examples of pure etching ever executed. The touching character of the scene, the sorrow of the by-standers, and the gentle action of Joseph, who is raising the Virgin in an endeavor to ease her

dying moments, are most truthfully expressed; even the pallor of death is strongly marked, and all this with so few and slight, yet masterly touches, that we are lost in wonder and admiration.

In the print of *Christ Healing the Sick*—his chef-d'œuvre—which receives its striking effect from a free use of the dry point, all the great qualities of Rembrandt are developed. The simplicity of design, the ease of composition, and mystery of chiaroscuro, while revealing the power and truth of the artist, make this one of the most impressive acts of Jesus.

The features of Christ are not such as a refined judgment might approve, yet it *is* Christ in all the sublimity of faith and tender love; and, although the powers of expression and interest attached to the surrounding groups are of the most engrossing character, yet the eye never loses the presence of the divine Healer.

Professional engravers, taking their rise in Marc Antonio, and speaking through the grandeur of line, the freedom of etching, and solemnity of Mezzotinto, have filled our folios with such a wealth of faithful and intelligent translations from nature and art, that any attempt to bring them to your notice would end in a mere catalogue of names and works, and weary where we would willingly please.

Yet, at the risk of invoking the unappeased shades of the many great dead, we cannot refrain from alluding to one,—Muller's print of *St. John*,—from the picture by Domenichino. There seems to be such an affinity between the character of "the disciple whom Jesus loved" and that of the engraver; and the purity of their lives and devoted and affectionate natures are so alike, that we have ever looked at this print with its beautiful dedication, "To his

father and master," with the most reverent feelings.

It is one of the noblest examples of pure line extant, and never were subject, painter, and engraver more closely allied. The grand flow of line, the dignity of drapery, and the rapt countenance of the Evangelist, remove it from the sphere of art, and elevate it into a revelation.

But the collector of prints is not limited solely to shining lights and great names,—always difficult to obtain in fine state or perfect preservation. Many an unobtrusive print, with no high-sounding reputation, is destined to furnish quite as much pleasure as a Durer or Rembrandt, Marc Antonio or Bolswert.

We call to mind a simple, unpretending little print, which would not be mentioned in the catalogue of any recognized collection; it is engraved by Oortman, after Rembrandt's picture in the Louvre, of

Christ and the two disciples at Emmaus, of which, Mrs. Jameson says, "Rembrandt took the subject of the supper at Emmaus, and baptised it in the pure waters of the gospel."

This picture is one of the most impressive that ever came from the hand of the great master of light and shade. The point of time taken is, when Christ broke the bread, and their eyes were opened and they knew him.

The engraver, entering into the feelings of the artist and the interest of the scene, has succeeded in the most admirable manner in rendering the divinity of Christ, and the awe and astonishment of the two disciples; and has, by a simplicity of work free from any show of labor or straining after effect, thrown around the whole print such an air of spirituality, that long after the original shall have faded and dimmed,

its charm will bind us through this exquisite reproduction.

The collection of prints, satisfying in youth the active quality of our nature,—which, unless brought under the subjection of intellect, degenerates into a mere search for novelty and excitement, with its corresponding violence of reaction,—is no less important as a refuge for age. As our bodily activity lessens, it become necessary to substitute a proportionate balance, so that age may not lapse into inertia; and this pursuit, by stimulating our perceptions of the beautiful, and keeping alive an interest in man, furnishes occupation and a healthy excitement for the mind; tending to preserve that which is beyond the power of medicine,—a sound mind in a sound body.

In conclusion, if we have succeeeded in convincing the reader that print-collecting,—which he may often hear termed a mere

hobby, or at the best a pleasurable pastime,—is entitled to be classed as a powerful agent for the cultivation and enlightenment of man; or shall have persuaded but one to follow in the footsteps of many excellent and virtuous men, and become also a lover and collector of prints,—the time has been well spent and the labor requited.

THE END.

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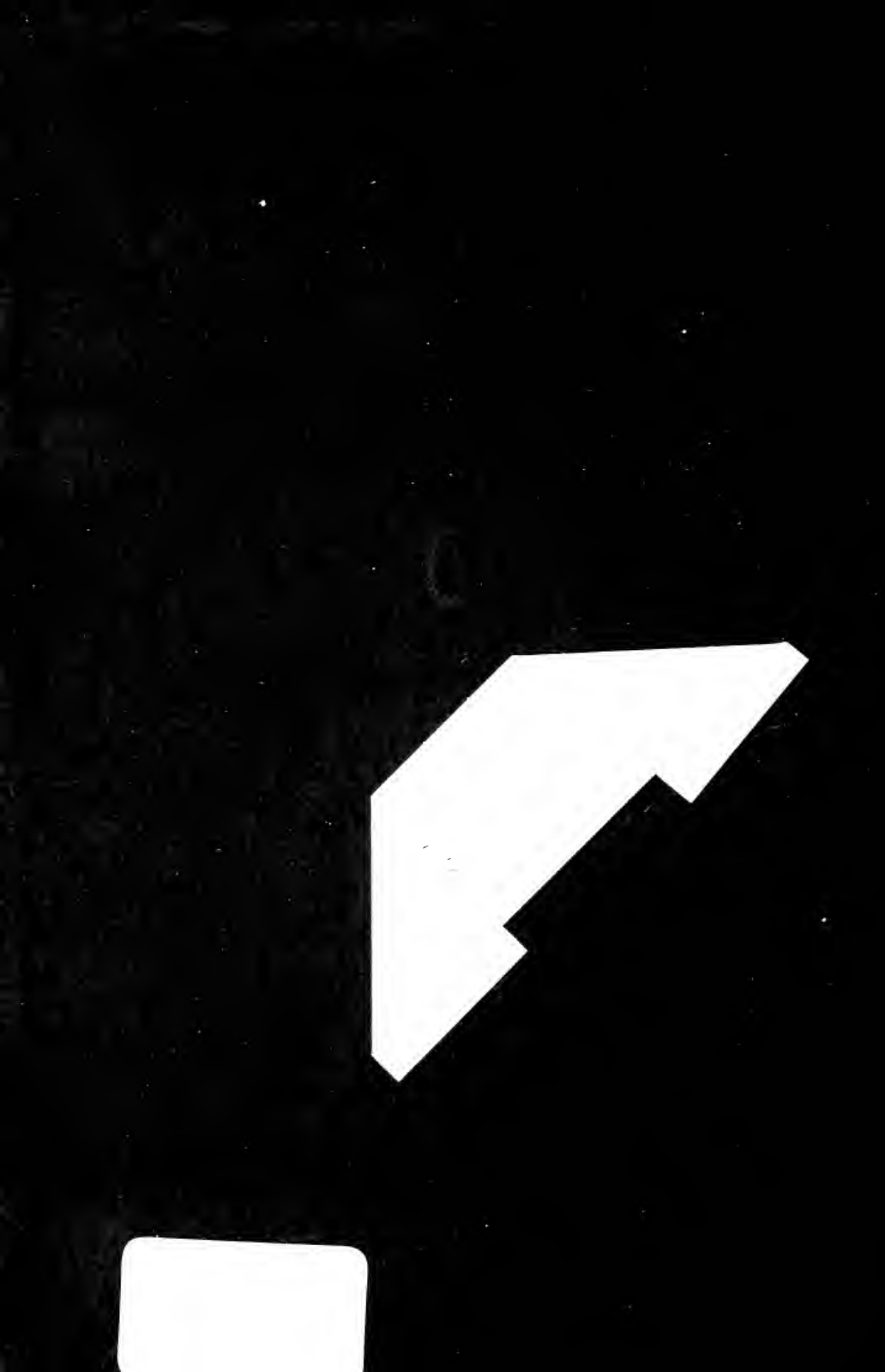
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